## Command Flags and Pennants of the Bundeswehr since 1956

## Andreas Herzfeld

After the Second World War, the German Reich and its army were dissolved and the Allies took over military and political governance. However, in 1945 the German Police Force was soon reconstituted, with the border police responsible for border controls.

The Cold War led to the division of Germany, and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was created in 1949. In 1951, the newly-established Federal Border Police undertook police and military functions, including the protection of the maritime border. With the Cold War intensifying in the early 1950s, the Western allies (UK, USA, and France) allowed the formation of a German army, the Federal Republic Armed Forces, called the Bundeswehr. Eventually, the completion of the Treaty of Rome allowed Germany to integrate with the West and its Bundeswehr to join NATO forces.

The German Bundeswehr has undergone six major restructurings in its history ${ }^{1}$, which have led to repeated supplements and modifications to its command flags. Those restructurings took place in 1957, 1959, 1961, 1973, 1995, and 2004.

On the 12 November 1955, the first 101 volunteers were admitted to the new German army; the term Bundeswehr was introduced on 1 April 1956. In the late 1960s the NATO "Flexible Response" strategy led to the reorganization of the army. The units released after the restructuring of 1970 were affiliated with the Territorial Command and merged into the homeland security commands. Those in turn were converted into twelve homeland security brigades in 1980, out of which two were active, four partly active, and six inactive. The integration of the National People's Army (NVA) and the territorial expansion due to the reunification of Germany in 1990, as well as deployments abroad since 1992, gave rise to the Armed Basic Force in 1995. Today, the Bundeswehr is structured in three categories of forces: response forces, stabilization forces, and assistance forces.

The Federal Ministry of Defense is the political leadership level of the Bundeswehr; it consists of the minister, the chiefs, and the operational headquarters staff. It oversees five forces and services: the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Armed Basic Force, and the Medical Service.

The army command and offices represent the highest leadership level of the military forces and services below the civilian oversight (the offices are responsible for development, training, organization, and armor).

A key to understanding the flags of the mid and lower levels of command is knowing the branch-of-service color. Since the era of Germany's imperial army, every branch of military service has had its own color. Some of those branch-of-service colors remain unchanged to this day, such as those of the infantry and the artillery. Besides being the basic color of the pennant, the branch-ofservice color sets the color of the cravat of the flag. The subdivisions of the Air Force and the Navy do not use branch-of-service colors.

In the Bundeswehr, the following branch-of-service colors are used today:
Branch of Military Service
Branch-of-Service Color(s)
Air Force (basic color)
Armed Basic Force (basic color)
Navy (basic color)
Medical Service (basic color)
Yellow, Light Blue
Red, Bright Red
Blue
Cobalt Blue, Dark Blue
Green, Grass Green
Army (basic color)

[^0]| Armored Reconnaissance | Yellow, Golden Yellow |
| :--- | :--- |
| Signals Corps | Lemon Yellow |
| Military Police | Orange |
| Artillery and Topography Troops | Red, Bright Red |
| Antiaircraft Artillery | Coral Red |
| Armor (Armored Corps) | Pink, Light Pink |
| Nuclear/Chemical Defense | Crimson |
| Technical Troops (Engineers and Logistics) | Medium Blue |
| Command Flag—Navy (basic color) | Blue |
| Command Flag—Air Force (basic color) | Light Blue |
| Army Medical Corps | Cobalt Blue, Dark Blue |
| Infantry (Armor and Mechanized Infantry) | Grass Green |
| Army Aviation | Light Gray |
| Bands | White |
| Pioneers (Engineers) | Black |

Command flags are always mounted on a car's front-left fender (for command flags without any specific descriptions see 2004).

## 1957

In March $1957^{2}$, command flags were first introduced in the Army and Air Force.
The command flag of the Army (Figure 1) is 30 cm . square, with four quadrants in black and yellow forming a square, and a broad red border.

The flag of the Air Force Command (Figure 8) adds white air force wings in the upper red border.

The Corps of the Army (Figure 2) has a command flag which is 30 cm . square with four triangles, peaks pointing to each other (top and bottom in black, left and right in yellow) forming a square, and a broad red border.

The flag of the Air Force Corps (Figure 9) adds in the flag’s center white air force wings which spread into the red border.

The Division Command, Regiment Command/Fighting Troops, Battalion Command/Units, and the Company Commands basically use the command flags for Army (Figures 3-7) and Air Force (Figures $11 \& 12$ ), identical with those of 2004. An exception is the Air Division of the Air Force (Figure 10), whose flag is a triangle 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide. It adds air force wing in white on a yellow field and a red border.

The short form of the unit name appears on both sides of the flag for: 1. flags used by the Corps and Army, where it is displayed in yellow in the upper black area, 2. flags of the divisions, where it appears in black in the upper hoist corner, and 3. flags of the regiments, where it appears in the branch-of-service color, reading downward on the center stripe.

No command flags are used by the Navy.

[^1]With the implementation of the second army structure, the command echelons received their own command flags ${ }^{3}$, in a consistent size of 22 cm . square.

The flag for the Armed Forces Chief of Staff (Figure 14) is the same as in 2004.
The flags for the Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy, the Air Force, and the Medical Service are the same as those used in 2004 (Figure 15), as well as the flag of the inspector of the Armed Basic Force.

The flags for the Chiefs of Staff and the Commander of Territorial Command (Figure 15), as well as the Commander of the Military Region (Figure 16) are identical to those of the Armed Basic Force in 2004.

## 1961

Just two years later, command flags were also adopted by the Navy and the Territorial Command $^{4}$ : the command flags of the Brigades (Figure 21) are triangles 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide. The flag of the Army matches the flag of 2004, while the flag of the Air Force (Figure 22) matches the flag of 1995.

In the Navy, command flags were introduced at the levels of the Battalion Command (Figure 23) (more specifically, the marine squadron and lighterage squadron) and to the Company Command (Figure 24) (for example, the company of a marine or a lighterage squadron).

In the Territorial Command (Figures 17-20), command flags were assigned to the following sections: brigade, regiment, battalion, and company-they mirrored those of the Army. The Federal Eagle shield was added. While the basic color was green, the branches took on the branch-of-service color of the Infantry (except the signal troops command, which adopted the branch-of-service color of the Army). The post headquarters in Munich, Koblenz, and Wilhelmshaven, as well as the military training area headquarters in Bergen-Hohne, Munster, and Baumholder, used the command flag of a regiment.

## $\underline{1973}$

After the Army was restructured in $1973^{5}$, two new command flags were introduced.
The command flag of the Chief of the Army Office (Figure 25) is 22 cm . square with four triangles, peaks pointing to each other (top and bottom in black, left and right in yellow) forming a square, and a broad red border. Crossed swords in yellow appear in the upper black triangle.

The command flag of the Commander of the Territorial Command (Figure 26) and Military Region (Figure 27) is 22 cm . square-it is the flag of the Armed Basic Force Office in 2004. It is labeled with either Roman numerals (e.g. "I"-to identify the Military Region 1) in yellow in the lower black area, or letters (e.g. "N"-for North or "S"-for South) in yellow in the upper black area. In the case of the state of Schleswig Holstein, the letter combination " $\mathrm{S}-\mathrm{H}$ " identifies the Commander of Territorial Command Schleswig-Holstein.

In the case of combat troops and the Territorial Command, the new structures were assigned to the existing command flags.

The following commanders of combat troops received a command flag:

- The commander of the corps carries the flag of a division with a white background (Figure 28),

[^2]- The commander of the divisions carries the flag of a brigade with a white background,
- The commander of the brigade units carries the flag of a regiment with a white background,
- The commander of the Army Aviation command, the commander of artillery troops, the commander of signal troops, the commander of the pioneer troops, the corps commander of technical troops, the corps commander of supply, and the commander of medical service troops, all carry the flag of a brigade,
- The corps commander of the anti-aircraft troops carries the flag of a regiment.

The following commanders of the Territorial Command received a command flag:

- The commander of region defense carries the flag of a brigade,
- The commander of district defense carries the flag of a regiment,
- The commander of the homeland security command, the commander of the supply command, and the commanders of the garrison command in Hamburg and Bremen, all carry the flag of a brigade.

Along with the commissioning of the German Army Assistance Command on 29 June 1995, the army largely adopted its new basic structure. On 8 August 1995 (Fü H I 7-Az 60-15-01), in anticipation of the expected reform of Army Rules 10/8, Chapter 7, General Egon Ramms in the Army's operational headquarters authorized new command flags for the Army. The following command flags were granted:

The Armed Forces Chief of Staff (Figure 14)—30 cm. square,
The Second-in-Command ${ }^{6}$ of Armed Forces Chief of Staff (Figure 29)—22 cm. square,
The Chiefs of Staff of Army (Figure 30), Air Force (Figure 31), Navy (Figure 32), and Medical Service (Figure 33)- 30 cm . square,

The Commander of Commands and Operational Headquarters of the Army (Figure 34), the Air Force (Figure 35), and the Navy Command (Figure 36)-22 cm. square; the Second-in-Command of the Operational Headquarters carries the pennant of a divisional commander, whose basic color is white (Figure 28).

Command flags were also granted to the Commanders of the Army (Figure 37) and Air Force Corps (Figure 38) (and to corresponding commands of the same level)- 22 cm . square, with four triangles, peaks pointing to each other (top and bottom in black, left and right in yellow) forming a square, and a broad red border. In the case of the Army, crossed swords in yellow appear in the upper black triangle, which displays a new design. The Roman numeral "II" in yellow appears in the lower black triangle to identify the Military Region II. The Second-in-Command of the Army Corps carries the white pennant of a divisional commander, with black labels in the upper hoist corner (Figure 28). In the case of the Air Force, large white air force wings appear in the center, with white lettering in the upper triangle (Figure 38).

The Chiefs of the Offices of Army, Air Force, and Navy and the Commander of the Armed Basic Force (Figure 42) also received a new command flag-22 cm. square, with four triangles, peaks pointing to each other (top and bottom in black, left and right in yellow) forming a square, a Federal Eagle shield in the center, and a broad red border. In the flag for the Army (Figure 39), crossed swords in yellow appear in the upper black triangle.

[^3]In the flag of the Air Force (Figure 40), yellow air force wings appear in the upper black triangle. In the Navy (Figure 41) command flag, a yellow anchor is displayed in the upper black triangle. The lower black triangle is labeled in yellow.

The command flag of the Division Commanders, or the commanders of corresponding commands of the same level, is a triangle 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide.

The flag of the Army (Figure 42) matches the one of 2004; the flag representing the Military Region command has an additional Federal Eagle shield and a black Roman numeral in the upper-left area, indicating the military region during peacetime (Figure 43).

The Second-in-Command (Figure 28, eagle added), who is the commander of the Military Region troops, carries the pennant of a brigade commander in white, with a Federal Eagle shield and black labels in the upper corner.

The command flag of the Air Force (Figure 10) has a yellow field and a red border. In the center are white air force wings, with black labels above the wings.

The command flag of the Brigade Commanders, or commanders of corresponding commands of the same level, is a triangle 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide.

The flag of the Army (Figure 50) matches the 2004 version. The deputy of the brigade commander, as the commander of the brigade units, carries the white pennant of a regiment commander, which is labeled in black on the center stripe. The flag of the local defense command adds a Federal Eagle shield and black labels in the lower area.

The Air Force (Figure 22) command flag has a yellow field, two narrow red stripes, and white air force wings in the center. Labels appear above the upper stripe in black (white in the case of the Pioneers).

The command flag of the Regiment Commanders, or commanders of corresponding command echelons, is a rectangle 24 cm . long and 18 cm . wide.

Army (Figure 51) and Air Force (Figure 62) flags are identical with those of 2004.
The flag of the Battalion Commanders, or commanders of corresponding command echelons, a triangle, is 24 cm . long and 18 cm . wide.

The flags for Army (Figure 52), Air Force (Figure 63), and Navy(Figure 56) are the same as of 2004. There are no labels provided for the Navy.

The command pennant of the Company Commanders, or commanders of corresponding command echelons, is a triangle 18 cm . long and 13.5 cm . wide.

The flags referring to the Army (Figure 53), Air Force (Figure 64) and Navy (Figure 57) match the ones of 2004. Again, there are no labels provided for the Navy.

## $\underline{2004}$

Finally in 2004, nine years later, the process of the reform of the command- and distinguishing flags was completed. In the associated Army rules 10/8, Chapter 7 is expected to be revised in 2009. For the first time, all levels of command (with deductions in the case of the Navy) were issued with their own flags. In detail, the following command flags were set ${ }^{7}$ for:

The flag of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff (Figure 14) is 30 cm . square, with four quadrants in black and yellow forming a square, a narrow red border, and a Federal Eagle shield in the center.

The flag of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff's Second-in-Command (Figure 29) is also 30 cm . square, with four quadrants in black and yellow forming a square, a narrow red border, and a Federal Eagle shield in the center. Narrow counterchanged stripes in black and yellow run diagonally from the center of the lowest point on the Federal Eagle shield to the outside corners of the lower quadrants.

[^4]Command flags were also granted to the Chiefs of Staff: they are 30 cm . square, with four small quadrants in black and yellow forming a square, a broad red border, and a Federal Eagle shield in the center.

The flag of the Army Chief of Staff (Figure 45) places crossed yellow swords in the upper red border; the flag of the Air Force Chief of Staff (Figure 58) has yellow air force wings in the upper red border; and the flag of the Navy Chief of Staff (Figure 54) has a yellow anchor in the upper red border.

The flags of the Deputy of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff (Figure 29) and the Armed Basic Force Chief of Staff (Figure 72) do not display additional symbols.

The flag of the Medical Service Chief of Staff (Figure 65) shows the staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow in the upper red border.

The command flag of the Commander of the Army Command / the Armed Forces Support Command is 22 cm . square, with four quadrants in black and yellow forming a square, and a broad red border. However, the Bundeswehr Operations Headquarters flag has a narrow red border. The symbols of the military branch of the medical service of the Bundeswehr are displayed in yellow, in the upper border.

The flag of the Chief of Office / Army Commander is 22 cm . square with four triangles, peaks pointing to each other (top and bottom in black, left and right in yellow) forming a square, a broad red border, and a Federal Eagle shield in the center.

The flag of the Chief of the Army Office (Figure 47) has crossed yellow swords in the upper red border. The flag of the Chief of the Air-Force Office (Figure 60), displays yellow air force wings in the upper red border. The flag of the Chief of the Armed Basic Force Office (Figure 75) has no additional symbols. The flag of the Chief of the Medical Service Office (Figure 60) displays the staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow in the upper red border.

In the case of the Army Corps Commander (Figure 48) crossed yellow swords appear in the upper red border, but no shield is displayed. The units' identification appears in yellow in the lower red border.

The command flag of the Division Commanders, or Commanders of corresponding commands of the same level, is a triangle 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide.

The Army's flag has black stripes which run horizontally and vertically to form a cross.
Green is the basic color for the Infantry Division, the Special Operations Division, and the Division of Army Aviation.

Pink is the basic color for the Armor Division-here, the black number in the lower-left area refers to the Armor Division (during missions) (Figure 49).

The Second-in-Command, who holds the position of the Commander of the division troops, carries the white pennant of a Brigade Commander. It is labeled in black in the lower corner.

The Air Force's command flag (Figure 61) has a yellow field and a light blue border. In the center are white air force wings, with black labels above the wings.

The basic color of the command flag of the Armed Basic Force (Figure 76) is green. Black stripes run horizontally and vertically to form a cross, with a Federal Eagle shield and black Roman numerals in the upper-left corner.

The command flag of the Central Medical Service of the Bundeswehr (Figure 68) is cobalt blue with a yellow border. The staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow is in the center. A Roman numeral in yellow is displayed next to the staff of Aesculapius in the upper-left corner.

In the case of the Brigade Commanders, or commanders of corresponding commands of the same level, their command flag is a triangle 30 cm . long and 22.5 cm . wide.

The basic color of the Army's flag (Figure 50) matches the color of the branch of service. There are two narrow horizontal stripes and labels in the lower area, both in black (white in the case of the Pioneers).

The basic color of the Armed Basic Force's command flag (Figure 62) is either green or the branch of service color. It has two narrow horizontal black stripes and an additional Federal Eagle shield. Black labels are shown in the upper green area.

The command flag of a Regiment Commander, or the commander of the corresponding command echelon, is a rectangle 24 cm . long and 18 cm . wide.

In the case of the Army (Figure 51), the command flag has a broad horizontal central stripe in black (white in the case of the Pioneers). The basic color of the command flag is the branch of service color. Labels are represented in the center stripe in either the basic color or in white (black in the case of the Pioneers).

The Air Force command flag (Figure 62) has a yellow background with a light blue border and white air force wings in its center. Black labels appear above the wings.

The Armed Basic Force (Figure 78) command flag is equipped with a broad horizontal black center stripe and an additional Federal Eagle shield. The basic color is the branch of service color. Labels in the center stripe are displayed in white.

In the case of the Central Medical Service of the Bundeswehr (Figure 69), the command flag is cobalt blue with a yellow border. There staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow is in the center. Labels appear next to the staff of Aesculapius in the upper-left part of the cobalt blue field.

The command flag of the Battalion Commanders, or commanders of corresponding command echelons, is a triangle 24 cm . long and 18 cm . wide.

The command flag representing the Army (Figure 52) has a broad horizontal central stripe in black (white in the case of the Pioneers). The basic color is the branch of service color. Labels can be seen in the central stripe in either the basic color or in white (black in the case of the Pioneers).

The Air Force command flag (Figure 63) is primarily colored in yellow and possesses a light blue border. In the center are white air force wings, with black labels above the wings.

The Navy command flag (Figure 56) is blue with a yellow border and a yellow anchor in the center. Yellow labels appear above the anchor.

The Armed Basic Force’s command flag (Figure 79) has a broad horizontal central stripe in black and a Federal Eagle shield. The basic color is consistent with the color of the branch of service. White labels referring to the battalion are shown in the center stripe.

The command flag of the Central Medical Service of the Bundeswehr (Figure 70) is cobalt blue with a yellow border. In the center is a staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow. Labels appear next to the staff of Aesculapius on the cobalt blue field.

The command pennant of the Company Commanders, or commanders of corresponding command echelons, is a triangle 18 cm . long and 13.5 cm . wide.

The Army command flag (Figure 53) has a broad vertical central stripe in black (white in the case of the Pioneers). The basic color is the branch of service color. Labels are in the center, in either black or white.

In the case of the Air Force (Figure 64), the command flag is completely yellow with a very narrow light-blue border. In the center are white air force wings, with black labels above the wing.

The Navy command flag (Figure 57) is blue, with a narrow yellow border and a yellow anchor in its center. Yellow labels appear next to the anchor.

In the Armed Basic Force (Figure 80), the command flag has a broad vertical central stripe in black and a Federal Eagle shield. The basic color is the branch of service color. The labels next to the Federal Eagle shield appear in either black or white.

The command flag of the Central Medical Service of the Bundeswehr (Figure 71) is cobalt blue, with a narrow yellow border. A staff of Aesculapius with a double-wound serpent in yellow is in its center. Labels appear next to the staff of Aesculapius.

## The Special Case of the Navy

Contradictory statements surface in the reform of the command and distinguishing flags in 2004-on one hand, no command flag is given for the Commander or the Chief of Office. On the other, an explicit reference in the text states—according to the Marine Rules (MDv) 161/1 "Flaggen-, Salut- und Besuchsordnung für Schiffe/Boote der Bundeswehr"-the commander of the fleet command holds the admiral's flag (Figure 55). In the case of substitution, the flag of a vice-admiral may be carried, according to the rank.

An earlier version of this paper appeared in German in Andreas Herzfeld, Die Rimann'sche Sammlung deutscher Autoflaggen und Kfz-Stander, Band 2—Deutschland seit 1945 (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Flaggenkunde e.V., 2009), pp. 94-112.
[TK edits 30 Oct. 2010]

# "Command flags and pennants of Bundeswehr since 1956" 

Andreas Herzfeld

1957

1. Army


1959


## 1961

1. Territorial Command

2. Other Commands


pic.25: Chief of Army Office

pic.26: Commander of Military Region
(I)

pic.27: Commander of Territorial Command (SchleswigHolstein)

pict.28: Deputy of Corps Commander (I. Corps)

1995

pic.14: Armed Forces Chief of Staff

pic.29: Deputy of Armed Forces Chief of Staff

Chiefs of Staff

pic.30: Army

pic.31: Air Force

pic.32: Navy

pic.33: Medical Service

## Commands and Operational Headquarters


pic.37: Army Corps Commander (Region II) pic.38: Air Force Commander (North)
Chiefs of the Offices


Army

pict. 43: Division Commander

1. Armor Division

Military Region II (peace time)

pict. 44: Division Commander

1. Armor Division (during mission)

2004

pic.14: Armed Forces Chief of Staff

pic.29: Deputy of Armed Forces Chief of Staff

1. Army

pict. 45: Army Chief of Staff

pict. 48: Army Corps
Commander

pict. 51: Regiment Command (Army Aviation)

pict. 46: Army Command

pict. 49: Division Command (Armor)

pict. 52: Battalion Command (Technical Troops)

pict. 47: Chief of the Army Office

pict. 50: Brigade Command (Infantry)

pict. 53: Company Command (Armored Reconnaissance)
2. Navy

pict. 54: Navy Chief of Staff

pict. 55: Admiral pict. 56: Commander Navy Special Forces

pict. 57: Company Navy Special Forces

## 3. Air Force


pict. 58: Air Force Chief of Staff

pict. 59: Air Force
Command

pict. 60: Chief of the Air Force Office

pict. 61: Division
Command

pict. 62:
Regiment/Wing Command

pict. 63: Battalion
Command

pict. 64: Company
Command

## 4. Medical Service


pict. 66: Medical Service
pict. 67: Chief of the Medical

pict. 65: Medical Service Chief of Staff

pict. 68: Division Command

pict. 69: Regiment
Command

pict. 70: Battalion Command

pict. 71: Company Command
5. Armed Basic Force

pict. 72: Armed Basic Force Chief of Staff

pict. 76: Division Command

pict. 73: Armed Basic Force Command

pict. 77: Brigade Command

pict. 74: Armed Basic Force Operation Command

pict. 78: Regiment Command

pict. 75: Chief of the Armed Basic Force Office
pict. 79: Battalion Command (Military Police)

pict. 80: Company Command (Technical Troops)


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ more information on www.bundeswehr.de

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ VMBL 1957, S. 323, order of 13 March 1957.

[^2]:    ${ }^{3}$ VMBL. 1959, S. 174, order of 17 February 1959.
    ${ }^{4}$ VMBL. 1961, S. 723, order of 10 August 1961.
    ${ }^{5}$ VMBL. 1973, S. 125, order of 9 March 1971.

[^3]:    ${ }^{6}$ The Second-in-Command would be an Executive Officer in the USA and a Deputy in the UK.

[^4]:    ${ }^{7}$ command and distinguishing flags_reform, in: VMBl 2004, pp. 167-171

